

# Road to equality for women started with 19th Amendment

Philadelphia has long been known as the birthplace of American democracy and freedom. Now, almost two and a half centuries later, another pivotal movement is taking shape in the city – one dedicated to advancing gender equality in all aspects of society.

The initiative, called Vision 2020, aims to make equality a national priority and a shared goal of both women and men.

“A true sharing of leadership and responsibility among women and men will inspire an unprecedented dimension of American excellence,” states Vision 2020’s Declaration of Equality.

I’m fortunate to be a regional ambassador for Vision 2020, which has representatives from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The year 2020 will mark the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, and is set as the target date for meeting our objectives.

## Taking Charge

Eileen Connolly-Robbins



It’s easy to feel weary when the topic of gender equality comes up because it seems as though we’ve been talking about it forever. Hasn’t some real progress already been made? It’s

fair to say that women, more than ever, are running businesses, occupying executive suites and leading in all sorts of different ways, but by objective measures the progress still falls far short of true equality.

According to a recent report by the Center for Women and American Politics at Rutgers University, Pennsylvania ranks 42nd of 50 states when it comes to the percentage of legislative officeholders who are women. (There’s just one woman in our congressional delegation, Allyson Schwartz, a Montgomery County Democrat.) Historically women vote at a higher rate than men; however, 40 percent of women (representing over 50 million registered voters) did not vote in the 2008 election.

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Another recent study by Catalyst – a national organization that promotes issues related to workplace inclusion and women in business – states that women held just 15.7 percent of board seats at Fortune 500 companies in 2010 and 14.4 percent of executive-officer positions. Numerous studies have also documented the salary disparity that women face. By one measure, women are paid just 77 cents for every dollar men earn.

Vision 2020 is a national initiative of the Institute for Women’s Health and Leadership at Drexel University College of Medicine and is spearheaded by two trailblazers from our area, Lynn Yeakel and Rosemarie Grecco. It has set five goals to be met by the year 2020:

■ Achieve pay equity, so that equal pay for equal work becomes the norm.

■ Increase the number of women in senior leadership positions to the fundamentally fair level of 50 percent.

■ Educate employers about the value of policies and practices that enable men and women to share fairly their family responsibilities.

■ Educate new generations of girls and boys to respect their differences and to act on the belief that America is at its best when leadership is shared and opportunities are open to all.

■ Mobilize women in America to vote, with the goal of having a record turnout in 2020, the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment.

I appreciate how Vision 2020 recognizes that gender equality is not just a “women’s issue.” When companies fail to put women at the board table, they sacrifice the financial benefits that can come from having as many diverse views as possible represented. When companies pay more to their male employees than their female ones, not just the women but also their families feel the pinch. When workplaces don’t recognize that all workers – men and women alike – need flexibility at times to care for their loved ones, talented workers sometimes opt out of leadership positions.

The Main Line Society of Professional Women salutes the work being done by Vision 2020. The year 2020 might sound far away, but with so much work to be done, time really is of the essence.

Want to know what you can do to get involved? Check out Vision 2020 at [www.drexel.edu/vision2020](http://www.drexel.edu/vision2020) for more information. There you can sign the Declaration of Equality and become a Vision 2020 charter member and you can also click on the “Become a Member” link to join the campaign for equality for as little as \$20.20. As a member you’ll receive the Vision 2020 newsletter so that you can stay up to date on issues of equality. The final verse of the Declaration is a fitting call to action: “There is an urgency to this matter because equality delayed is opportunity denied.”

In addition, you can ask your congressman or woman to co-sponsor the Paycheck Fairness Act bill. Last month the Paycheck Fairness Act was reintroduced to Congress in honor of Equal Pay Day. The Act was two votes short of passing in the Senate during the last Congress. Visit Vision 2020’s National Ally the National Women’s Law Center’s Web site at [www.nwlc.org](http://www.nwlc.org) to find out more.

Don’t miss SPW’s next opportunity for you to network and learn valuable insight on having “Productivity in Stilettos.” Join us on June 23 at Radnor Valley Country Club to hear from international productivity expert Neen James. She’ll teach us strategies on how to make the most out of your

24-hour day without going crazy!

For more information or to register go to [www.spwmainline.com](http://www.spwmainline.com).

Eileen Connolly-Robbins is the founder of the Society of Professional Women, Main Line Chamber of Commerce.